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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001869

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AF FOR A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: GOE SAYS NO INCURSION IN SOMALIA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1783

Classified By: A/DCM KEVIN SULLIVAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: An Ethiopian government spokesman publicly denied that Ethiopian troops had crossed the Somali border and reaffirmed Ethiopia's desire to work with regional partners on a response to the situation in Somalia. Meanwhile, a senior Ethiopian military official has assured post that the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) have staged no large-scale or conventional military incursions into Somalia. Clandestine reporting indicates that the GOE has for some time provided training to TFG militia and may also be conducting small reconnaissance missions in Somalia in preparation for possible future operations. Both of these activities involve small numbers of Ethiopia troops on Somali soil and could generate sporadic reports of ENDF presence on the ground across the border. END SUMMARY.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL, NOT UNILATERAL, ACTION

12. (U) Over the July 1 weekend, GOE spokesman Zemedhun Tekle denied reports that Ethiopian troops had crossed the border into Somalia. "The allegation is the usual fabrication of the Islamists group aimed at hoodwinking the public," he added. Zemedhun reiterated Ethiopia's desire to work with regional governments to address the situation in Somalia and reaffirmed that the GOE saw no reason to take unilateral action unless "the Islamists" crossed the Ethiopian border.

13. (U) The GOE spokesman's statements echoed remarks Prime Minister Meles had made to the media several days earlier on Somalia. Meles told reporters that "Ethiopia supports the position taken on (Somalia) by Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU) and the international community." Meles said that position consisted of 1) support for the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs); 2) opposition to the extension of military operations by the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC); and 3) the need for dialogue within the framework of acceptance of the TFIs. The PM emphasized that the GOE did not see the UIC as a monolithic organization and understood that many Somalis had supported the UIC as a way to bring order to chaotic Mogadishu. He added, however, that "the threat posed to Ethiopia by the dominance of the UIC by Al-Itihad (AIAI) is obvious." Meles recalled that AIAI had been involved in terrorist outrages in the Ethiopian capital. He acknowledged

that Ethiopia had "beefed up defenses all along the border to prevent any threat to our security that might emanate from the resurgent Jihadists in Mogadishu to the extent that they deploy their forces in such a way as to be an immediate danger to our security...at the moment, they are not a clear danger to us. They may become so if they cross the line. They know where that line is and so do we. So far they have not crossed it."

PRIVATE LINES IN THE SAND STILL NOT CROSSED

14. (C) Meles' references to "crossing the line" likely refer not to Somalia's border with Ethiopia, but rather to thresholds for action Meles identified in reftel, such as attacking the TFI's in Baidoa or failure to withdraw from strategic towns near the border like Belet Uen.

15. (C) On July 3, a senior ENDF officer told DATT that Ethiopia had not sent troops into Somalia over the previous weekend. If the ENDF had sent regular troops across the border, the official said, they would already be engaged in conventional military clashes. Furthermore, the logistics support required for a large-scale military movement would be impossible to hide from the international community. The ENDF officer said UIC charges that Ethiopia had already moved militarily were part of an extensive public relations campaign against Ethiopia. The UIC was unlikely to fight Ethiopia in a conventional battle; therefore, it would try to weaken Ethiopia's hand through propoganda and manipulation of historical conflicts between the two countries, as well as the idea of a "Greater Somalia" including Ethiopia's Somali region.

ADDIS ABAB 00001869 002 OF 002

16. (C) The ENDF officer indicated to DATT that the GOE maintained indirect contacts with UIC leaders and continued to send the message that the UIC should maintain its current military positions and not cross the Ethiopian border.

COMMENT: NO MAJOR OFFENSIVE, BUT SOME ENDF TROOPS LIKELY IN SOMALIA

17. (C) While the PM and others deny that Ethiopian troops have entered Somalia, clandestine reporting indicates that the GOE has for some time provided training to TFG militia. It would also be consistent with standard Ethiopian military doctrine to conduct small reconnaissance missions in Somalia in preparation for possible future operations. Both of these activities would involve small numbers of Ethiopia troops on Somali soil and could generate sporadic reports of ENDF presence on the ground across the border.

HUDDLESTON